



# **INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF FIRE FIGHTERS®**

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**TESTIMONY BEFORE THE**

**SCIENCE, TECHNOLOGY AND SPACE SUBCOMMITTEE**

**OF THE SENATE**

**COMMERCE, SCIENCE AND TRANSPORTATION COMMITTEE**

**ON**

**THE NEEDS OF THE FIRE SERVICE IN**

**RESPONDING TO TERRORISM**

**OCTOBER 11, 2001**



**BY**  
**HAROLD A. SCHAITBERGER**  
**GENERAL PRESIDENT**

Mr. Chairman. I thank you for the opportunity to appear before this subcommittee today.

My name is Harold Schaitberger, and I am the General President of the International Association of Fire Fighters (IAFF). I started my career in 1966 as a professional fire fighter with the Fairfax County, Va., Fire and Rescue Department and I now have the honor of representing more than 245,000 professional fire fighters and paramedics who protect 80 percent of our nation's population.

The 344 firefighters, who made the ultimate sacrifice one can make in our profession and rescued tens of thousands of civilians from the hellish carnage of the World Trade Center tragedy, are my brothers, as are the thousands of fire fighters who responded to the terrorist attacks in New York and at the Pentagon on September 11.

Mr. Chairman, I come before this committee as a man on a mission to improve public safety, to better protect the safety of our nation's fire fighters, and to ensure our nation's fire service is prepared to respond to the inevitable terrorist attacks our nation will face in the future.

Like all Americans I watched the television with horror as the planes hit the World Trade Center and the Pentagon. Within minutes of those attacks, I knew that hundreds of my firefighters were responding to the call, entering those buildings, and placing themselves at risk. When the first tower collapsed, I also knew we had lost hundreds of firefighters under millions of tons of jagged steel and debris - and it was time for the IAFF to pull its crisis team together and go to work.

Within hours, I was at the Pentagon meeting with our fire fighters there. By the next morning, we had reached out to Congress for help, and you responded by passing a resolution to streamline the process for putting Public Safety Officers Benefits into the hands of the families of our fallen heroes.

By Wednesday afternoon, we were in New York with our people there. We worked with our New York affiliates to create the New York Firefighters 9-11 Disaster Relief Fund to provide assistance to our devastated families. We established an office in Manhattan and put IAFF staff in the offices of our two affiliates to help them deal with the many issues faced by our New York fire fighters and fire officers. And we met with senior Fire Department of New York officials and FEMA officials to put a comprehensive counseling program in place, involving trained IAFF members from fire departments across the nation.

The world has seen the images of Ground Zero on television, but video and photographs cannot capture, nor words describe, the utter devastation of the scene we witnessed in New York that day on the site of what was once two tall proud symbols of the American spirit.

For a week following the attacks, I stayed in New York to oversee our operations there and I continue to return each week. Day after day, night after night, our New York fire fighters continue to dig through the mountains of rubble in search of their fallen brothers. They are working beyond exhaustion, but they are working with a determination that is the hallmark of our profession.

For our fire fighters in New York, it is still September 11.

All of us - our fire fighters, the widows and the 1,000 fatherless children of our IAFF family in New York, and citizens across this nation - must now live with the knowledge that we have suffered an unthinkable loss that will be etched in our hearts and our souls for the rest of our lives.

As profound as the loss and the devastation we face, is the enormous challenge that lies ahead--preparing the nation's fire service for its role in the coming war against terrorism.

Only a few weeks ago, the evils wrought upon our nation by these unrepentant terrorists were only a remote, nightmarish threat. Now the reality of such evil will always be with us as we wait and wonder what will come next. And come it will. As the U.S. intelligence agencies have told the members of this chamber and as Administration officials like Attorney General Ashcroft and Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld have stated publicly, the likelihood of other terrorist acts is "100 percent."

In this first war of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, the battle lines are drawn in our own communities and civilians and the places we frequent are explicit targets. In this war, the fire fighters are the nation's domestic defenders.

In many ways, this is not a new role for us. For nearly 100 years, IAFF members have been protecting the citizens of our nation from all hazards. We are the first on the scene when there is an incident involving hazardous materials, we

are the nation's primary providers of emergency medical care, and we are the ones who search for and rescue people who are trapped and in danger.

But while the job we need to perform in this war is familiar, the magnitude of the challenge before us is unprecedented. In the past, we have had to respond to isolated incidents. In this new world, we need to be prepared for a coordinated, well-orchestrated series of attacks on American citizens. While we all tend to look toward the military in time of war, the reality is that in this war on terrorism, it is fire fighters who will be our first line of defense.

If we are to be successful in fulfilling our mission, we must have adequate resources. Sadly, as of today, we do not. The need for additional fire fighters, on-going training, and equipment is tremendous and it can no longer be born solely by local jurisdictions. As evidenced by the response to the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, where fire departments from many different jurisdictions responded to the attacks, the federal government must recognize that terrorist acts are not local incidents, but national tragedies that need a federal response.

Just days after the September 11 attacks, FEMA Director Joe Allbaugh highlighted the need for additional resources. Fire fighters, he said, "put their lives on the line everyday and yet they are always the first in line for budget cuts and the last in line for recognition. That's got to stop."

To address this crisis, the nation's leading fire service groups came together to compile a list of 12 items Congress should address immediately to prepare the nation's fire service for our role in protecting America against terrorism. We have entitled this document, "Protecting Our Nation: the Immediate Needs of America's fire service." There are two areas to which I would like to draw your attention.

First is the need for training. As fire fighters are being called upon to protect the public from terrorism, I cannot stress enough the need for specialized training in terrorism and hazmat response and mitigation. I am proud to note that the IAFF, in partnership with DoJ, DoE, DoT, EPA and HHS, offers training programs to fire departments--free of charge--in terrorism and hazmat response. Our program utilizes the expertise of hazmat technicians who are also certified instructors to teach the course to fire fighters.

Unfortunately, the demand for our training program far outpaces our funding to deliver it. Our ability to deliver the training is only limited by the funding we get from our federal partners. If our grants from the various federal agencies are increased, the IAFF can dramatically increase the number of fire departments trained in terrorism and hazmat response and mitigation.

The second area of need, and the one stands above all others, is adequate

staffing. Adequate staffing is important for public safety as well as for the safety of fire fighters performing that mission. The IAFF has long recognized that fire ground safety is inextricably linked to adequate staffing.

There are numerous studies that attest to the dangers of inadequate fire fighter staffing. Attached to my written statement is a bibliography of the studies to which I refer. But I don't need studies to tell me something that I've known for a long time. As a fire fighter on the hose line and now as the general president of the IAFF, I have witnessed firsthand the grave consequences of short staffing.

In Memphis, Tennessee; Worcester, Massachusetts; Keokuk, Iowa; Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania; Chesapeake, Virginia; Stockton, California; Lexington, Kentucky; Buffalo, New York; Philadelphia, Pennsylvania and Washington, DC, fire fighters were killed because of a lack of staffing. In each of these cases, if there was a team in place that accounted for the fire fighters who were performing interior structural fire fighting, they would be alive today.

Yet, numerous jurisdictions are not taking to heart the lessons from these tragic events. Currently, 2/3 of all fire departments--large and small--operate with inadequate staffing. Across the nation, in cities like Buffalo, New York and Baltimore, Maryland, fire stations are being closed due to budget cuts. In fact, the lack of adequate staffing hampered the ability of the Baltimore Fire Department to respond to the hazmat incident caused by the train derailment in downtown Baltimore back in July.

In the face of the mounting evidence of a severe shortage of fire fighters, the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA)--the consensus, standard making body of the fire service--this summer issued its first standard on minimum staffing for fire departments. Ten years in the making, NFPA 1710 sets minimum acceptable standards for adequate personnel per fire fighting vehicle. With this new benchmark we now know that our nation needs an additional 75,000 fire fighters to safely and effectively protect the nation.

That is why the IAFF along with the International Association of Fire Chiefs (IAFC) and several Members of Congress have strongly endorsed the SAFER Fire Fighters Act that was unveiled just today. The SAFER Fire Fighters Act uses the procedures established by the highly successful COPS program to place 75,000 additional fire fighters in our communities.

Using the model of the COPS program's Universal Hiring Program, the SAFER Fire Fighters Act provides federal grants to communities to hire additional fire fighters. The federal government would cover the cost of 75% of salary and benefits for a three-year period, not to exceed \$90,000 over the three years. Local jurisdictions would then be required to retain the fire fighter position for at least one

additional year. The experience of the Universal Hiring Program is that once a jurisdiction invests four years in an individual, it is highly likely that the individual will be retained.

The SAFER Fire Fighters Act is an innovative approach to solving the nation's need for more fire fighters. It is an example of the new type of federalism that our country needs to combat terrorism. Numerous federal studies and reports bemoan the lack of coordination between the different levels of government. The SAFER Fire Fighters Act would be a step towards better cooperation and coordination amongst local, state and federal governments to respond strongly and decisively to terrorism.

Despite the pain, the grief and the sorrow we feel and despite the unspeakable loss we have suffered, the nation must forge ahead and honor the memories of our fallen by taking steps to ensure that from this point forward we take all necessary steps to prevent such tragedies from ever occurring again.

As our nation prepares for war, we must not forget that the battles to come will be fought on our soil as well. The fire fighters of the IAFF will be ready when terrorists strike again. But our ranks are thin and reinforcements are needed quickly.

Thank you for this time to present the view of the IAFF. We appreciate the heartfelt expressions of condolences and the prayers that Congress and America have offered for our fallen comrades. I ask that you honor their memory and sacrifice by building a living memorial. Provide us with resources to ensure adequate staffing so that we can operate safely and effectively and to provide necessary training so that we will be able to play our role in fighting the war on terrorism. I will be available for questions by the committee.

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